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FROM

WISDOM COURT

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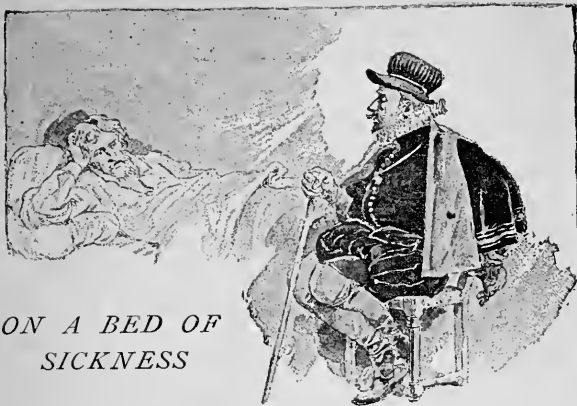
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ON A BED OF
SICKNESS

"When the sound of the grinding is low."

ONE of us has been ill. We know now that it is better to be ill if there is a good lock on the door, than to hale within hail, so to speak, of one's relatives. We went to church—that is how it came about—although we have to a certain extent refrained from publishing this fact, and we both caught cold. One cold was thrown off—literally thrown off—by a series of most heartrending and collar-bursting sneezes. The other took a downward course, and fixed its fancy upon the bronchial tubes. In the middle of the night the victim awoke gasping and announced his intention of forthwith quitting this vale of trouble. We administered whisky—we always do ; and rubbed the affected throat with top-boot varnish because it smelt like Elliman's

Embrocation. The remainder of the night was somewhat disturbed.

In the morning we called in a friend—house-surgeon in a neighbouring hospital. This promising physician owed one of us a trifle, and we thought it expedient to work off the debt in advice, and, if possible, medicine. He looked grave, and placed his ear against the victim's chest, while he made him repeat inane observations, such as "Ninety-nine!" "Ah!" "One, two, three, four!" We laughed openly at these proceedings. We knew this house-surgeon too well to be at all impressed by the tricks of his trade.

After much listening and considerable tapping the doctor made sundry statements of a depressing nature, and decreed poultices, a fire in the bedroom, and no stimulants. Moreover, he would not allow the patient to smoke. He spoke quite plainly in the sick man's hearing and concealed none of his thoughts.

The result was that when he had departed we found ourselves face to face with a serious illness. After considerable deliberation we came to the conclusion that the street must be strewed with tan in front of the house. It was a narrow street, where no cabs ever passed, because it led nowhere except into a legal-minded court; but

we had always understood that tan was spread upon the roadway in front of the house containing a bed of sickness. Neither of us knew where to buy tan ; it was not in the Price List of the Civil Service Stores, and Walker's Dictionary was silent on the subject. We wrote to an enterprising tradesman in Westbourne Grove, who apparently mis-read our communication, for he replied next day giving an estimate for the maintenance of one brougham-horse, in weekly instalments. We were subsequently compelled to give up the tan.

For a whole week the dire sickness raged unknown to our relatives, but at the end of that time the news leaked out, owing, it is believed, to an invitation to a family dinner-party having been quietly ignored. We immediately received from the seven most useless female relatives we jointly possessed, seven offers of help. Two of them were so urgent that they called for prompt action. We were compelled to telegraph perversions of the truth. Others were treated by post. Nevertheless, one philanthropist arrived next day in a cab, with luggage for a month and a small ($4\frac{1}{2}$ d.) jar of Beef Extract for the patient. There was a lamentable scene on the front door-step between a man with a pipe in his mouth and an elderly lady with an umbrella,

two band-boxes and a bronchitis-kettle in her hand. We consented to add the bronchitis-kettle to our collection, but rejected all offers of personal assistance. Knowing our medical attendant as we did, and being intensely conscious of the trifling monetary matter which bound him body and soul to us, we had no compunction in risking his reputation. We credited him with a marvellous minuteness of observation, a deep and searching grasp of the situation. The patient was, according to our version of Æsculapius, on no account to see any one, more especially female relatives. His condition was such that the joy of meeting with a dear aunt might produce the gravest symptoms. "Not yet," we said with but indifferently concealed feeling; "when he is a little stronger—when the crisis is over." We hinted mysteriously at assistance from the hospital, and tied up the door-knocker with an old sock in a manner which we deemed intensely professional.

In default of personal assistance, our relatives then took to showering upon us advice in an epistolary form. This assumed such gigantic proportions that the postman concluded (as we ultimately learned) that we were either engaged to be married, or that some departed one had remembered us handsomely.

The postman, however, was not the only sufferer. The London Parcels Delivery man also found himself under a stress of work. By this means we received : four wooden constructions which the doctor informed us had been in use among the ancients as invalid tables ; two cane-work articles for propping up something—possibly the patient—in bed ; five china cups with half a lid and a long spout ; two medicine glasses ; three india rubber air-cushions ; one small hand-bell, and a broken thermometer. These, as far as we can recollect, with the trifling exception of nine bronchitis-kettles with an abnormal development of spout, were all that we received in the way of furniture or properties.

Some kind folk—bless them—sent us more practical souvenirs. Thus, one dear old lady despatched every third day a box containing jellies, soups, eggs, and grapes. This was as it were a regular supply, and in addition we had at odd times other contributions. The patient appreciated this form of philanthropy, and the nurse waxed so fat that he is not in training to this day. The best of this relative (and she a distant one) was that she gave us no advice except that of the despatch of a box. She wrote postcards—heaven shine upon her old head !—“ Dear H.,

Have sent off to-day a small box containing hare-soup, eggs, and a few grapes. Mind, send back the empties."

Others sent us a lot of advice and very little soup—no eggs, and never a grape. Moreover, the advice was of such a nature as to be a positive insult not only to the recipient, but to the university which had bestowed some small honours upon him. We append an example or two.

"DEAR H.,—As cook's second cousin died of bronchitis two years ago, I have thought that you might be glad to have a few practical hints as to nursing poor Mr. T. You must ensure a high and even temperature in the room. This is done by keeping up a good fire. On no account open the window, especially if there is an east wind. The doctor (I have not heard his name before) will no doubt see to medicines; but I am told that lemon-juice with sugar and hot water is an excellent thing in cases where medicine is not obtainable. It is essential that the patient be kept quiet, and if Aunt Eliza should offer to go and help you I should make her understand once for all that you can manage without her.

"If there is anything I can do let me know ;

I shall be most happy to come at a moment's notice and take entire charge. I can easily leave home just now as they are putting a new boiler in the kitchen. Write to me every two days.—Your affectionate great aunt, JANET."

"MY DEAR H.,—I had diphtheria when a boy, so know all about it. Some people say it is infectious, but I don't believe them ; nevertheless you may as well telegraph poor T.'s progress instead of writing, as it is safer. If I were you I should have a trained nurse. Keep the room well aired, and pay your way as you go along. No doubt you have something laid by for a rainy day. When next in town I shall let you know. You can meet me at the station, as I should like a chat with you.—Your affectionate uncle,
JOSEPH."

Another uncle despatched unto us a telegraphic note informing us that he had given instructions to a person called Barkle to pack up a dozen of port for us. We laid that port down—started a cellar as it were—but we are of too anxious a disposition for a cellar. We sampled the wine so often, just to mark its progress toward maturity, that there is now none of it left.

It was only when our medical adviser told us

that the patient was convalescent that we informed him of our intention to cancel that trifling debt dating two Derby days back.

“All right,” he said. “We’ll call it quits ; but I am coming in every other night to take duty. A fellow cannot nurse night and day for three weeks without losing his hold a little bit, and I don’t want to have you on my hands as well.”



ON
MATRIMONY

*"Be not confident in
a plain way."*

THIS is a large subject—so large that the most daring cannot but approach it with misgiving. In order to demonstrate that we advance with caution we shall begin before the beginning, and end, so to speak, before we have begun.

It is to the many, the light-hearted, the light-footed, the youthful, that the sapient remarks hereinafter set forth are more particularly addressed, in the full and comforting assurance that they will be in no wise heeded. It is, in fact, to the young men and maidens who look forward to matrimony as the aim and end of their existence that we would throw out a few

warning notes like the call of a steamer's whistle proceeding cautiously in a fog.

To the innocent maiden therefore, who alternately urges on and presses back the catastrophe trembling on the lips of some aspiring swain, we would say : Go and sit down quietly in some matter-of-fact place—say the bath-room. Have nothing to do with flickering fires in the twilight hours, or shimmering moonlight. Go therefore, to the bath-room and, sitting quietly upon the washed-out and forlorn chair you will find there, think !

Think whether he would be entirely satisfactory at a ball and at a funeral, at a wedding (not his own, for that would be expecting too much) and at a christening. Think whether he would be likely to make an idiot of himself at any of these functions. Make quite sure of these points before you go any further. Then, given a satisfactory result to your questions—satisfactory that is to your own mind, for it does not matter about other people—you may go on to other matters. You may meditate upon his personal appearance. Reflect that his hair will not always be tidy. Contemplate him in your mind's eye with a smut upon his countenance, and see what he looks like then. Remember that he looks at himself in the hall glass before entering

the drawing-room, and do not forget that in his pilgrimage through life he may come to you through a hall where there is no looking-glass. Put him, like the proverbial beggar on horse-back—mentally of course—and watch the result. In the same manner place an oar within his grasp, or the sheet and tiller, or a gun, strap skates upon his feet, upset him out of a boat if you like. If he goes through all these ordeals satisfactorily, if you are sure that in no one case you need to feel too much ashamed of him, if above all you need not fear for his dignity in the presence of other men, then—THEN—you may think about *it* a second time.

To the young man (in the spring) we would say : Cultivate the friendship of her brother. There is an admirable candour about a brother which is likely to dispel the many illusions that arise from delicate evening dresses, semi-illuminated conservatories and gaslight generally. There is no gaslight about a brother. He will give you an unbiased opinion as to Angelina's temper. We should not be surprised were he to volunteer details of a domestic nature as to the size of her shoes and the difficulties she encounters in making the ends of her waistband and her dress allowance meet. We would suggest gently that the art of waltzing has remarkably

little to do with life after matrimony, and that it is a mistake to attach too great importance to a proficiency in that pleasant exercise. We would also venture to shrug the shoulder of scepticism at the advice tendered by former writers on this subject as to fixing the choice upon one who is domesticated and a good housekeeper, with a corner in her heart for a recipe. All that will come if you play your part respectably.

It is possible to be too good a housekeeper. Some women seem to be under the impression that their husbands are one large—what shall we say?—waistcoat. If you are fond of horses and all that appertains thereto it is worth while noting that Angelina is afraid to approach within a dozen yards of any one leg of a horse. If you love the country, the fact that the lady you propose proposing to is never happy off the pavement, is not without its value. Of course, these trifling differences are of no consequence to love if it be spelled with a capital L. The lady-novelist has told us so. We would merely suggest that they are worthy of a little attention in passing. Beware of Glamour—fight against it—cast it from you as you would a cheap brand of Champagne. After indulging in either, one is apt to wake up with a head and without a heart.

If, for instance, you are inwardly aware that Angelina's nose is slightly out of the perpendicular, do not persuade yourself that it is straight. It is infinitely better to accept her and her nose as you find them—remembering that your own chin recedes with rather more precipitation than was admired in old Athens. If the peerless one has a little, a very little fault in her character, do not pretend that it does not exist. Look it boldly in the face and meditate over it. Consider whether you will be able to stand it with equanimity during the years of a future which extends—goodness knows whither. If you find that you cannot stand it, be very wary ; for that means that some day you will not be able to stand Angelina.

Remember that you take her for better and for worse, and do try to realize that there is in most lives a good deal more of the worse than of the better. 'In fact, it would be expedient to repeat to yourself that you are taking her for the worse—the better is hardly worth bringing into account.

Finally, we would take you both aside to a quiet corner of the room, and there we would say :

Bless you ! Pay no heed to us, nor to any one in the world, so long as you are quite sure

of yourselves and of each other. But be careful that you *are* quite sure. You are taking a huge step in life, but life is not a stationary pastime. One must step forward sometimes, and it is better to make a good honest stride than to sneak tremblingly along with faltering feet. You will have a little sunshine and a vast quantity of shadow, but the sunshine will be brighter if you share it, the shadow less dense if you walk hand in hand through it. Troubles will come, big ones and little ones. Please God certain little troubles will arrive that patter about the house with tiny feet, making music as they go. There will be the sound of uncertain crooning voices on the stairs, and the sound will be very eloquent to your ears. Yes! go on and prosper. And let us know the date. We have a pair of blue china candlesticks presented to us on an auspicious occasion some years ago by a well-meaning but misguided paternal aunt. We always thought they would come in somehow.

P.S.—Do not furnish on the hire system.



ON THE POSTCARD

"The heart of fools is in their mouth, but the mouth of the wise is in their heart."

SINCE the invention of the postcard we have confined ourselves entirely to this mode of correspondence. We think with Shakespeare, that "brevity is the soul of wit," and are of the more original opinion that it is the cement of friendship and the safeguard of affection. What a vast amount of heart-burning and wounded feeling this custom of ours has saved our friends! When we take our holiday no one expects voluminous accounts of our doings, and, so far from being offended at the occasional card of three lines, it delights them because they know

we never write a letter to any one. We enjoy our day's shooting without the heavy cloud overhanging us of that letter to be written when we are tired and drowsy in the evening. When other people are scribbling excitedly to catch the post, with pens peculiar to a remote Highland inn, we smoke, with our legs on the mantelpiece, and that restfulness of mind particularly engendered by the fact that the way of peace is far from our companions. For us there is never a haunting vision of perturbed faces and anxious spirits, when we have forgotten to write on a certain day or omitted to inquire at what time the post goes out. We never promise even our postcards. We take care that they shall not only be a delight but also a delightful surprise.

When other people are getting warm and distracted over the problem of how to express sympathy with a friend whose uncle is dead, and has left him his money, we have calmly indited and posted a card—"Just heard your news. Feel much for you in every way," which pleases that friend and causes him to say that, though we have fallen into that strange habit of only writing postcards, we are as kind-hearted and sympathetic as any fellow he knows.

When our cousin, who emigrated to Australia before we had made his acquaintance, loses his

mother-in-law in the back-woods, our admirable postcard system obviates the necessity of searching for Scripture texts to express sorrow which we don't and can't feel, and to offer him consolation which he doesn't want. There would be something profane in a text on a postcard, especially on a foreign postcard.

When we are travelling abroad, let us say in Switzerland, no one expects us to write intelligently on the places we visit, or to be eloquent about the scenery. Intelligence would be out of place and there is no room for eloquence.

“ LAUSANNE. HOTEL MAL SAIN.

“ Arrived here. Send tin Keating by return,”

amply satisfies, we find, the most loving and anxious of our relatives whom we have educated up to our short, sweet mode of correspondence.

How will our future son and heir bless this custom of ours when we receive a report from Eton, “ Good abilities but incorrigibly idle.” ! For it is not dignified to be very wrathful upon a card which the page-boy is certain to peruse on his way to the pillar-box and upon which the postal authorities of our native village will comment with winks and smiles. How much more will this same son and heir call down benedic-

tions on our habit when he outstrips his allowance at college. A postcard renders sound advice impossible and is not large enough to allow of an awful and graphic picture representing the final ruin of the debtor.

We own there are difficulties in the way of making love in this manner. But they are not insurmountable. We should think poorly of a young lady who could not read between the lines, even the lines of a postcard. Besides, English is not a universal tongue. There are other languages in which beautiful sentiments may be expressed without pandering to the vulgar curiosity of the postman, or gratifying the servant's thirst for information.

Indeed, there are reasons why, in affairs of the heart, the postcard system is especially to be commended. It may be said to be practically invaluable to young ladies who are always in love, but not always with the same person.

One of us had in his desk for a long while a packet of letters, in an agitated feminine handwriting. There was an Arrangement announced in the Fashionable Intelligence of our newspaper one morning, and the same evening, over the meditative pipe, we watched those ladylike communications turn to ashes on their funeral pile. The pretty writer has less cause than many peo-

ple to wish she had confined herself to the sweet simplicity of "one side only."

Neither has the pleasure we have derived from the receipt of letters been very great. We prefer postcards. Persons in pecuniary embarrassment could not, we think, on a card, stir our hearts to such practical sympathy as they sometimes do in a letter. A tailor, with a soul full of righteous indignation, would be much less impressive.

We should regard our maiden aunts who, as they say, "chat" with us through the post, with a far greater warmth of affection if they compressed their chatting—it might be done easily, and with no particular loss to any one—on to a postcard.

Neither do we receive with especial hilarity long communications from friends abroad. There is a poorness about the paper, and a suggestion all over it of the pens having caught it, not to mention an illegibility about the writing, which aggravate us. We are especially tried if these correspondents are fond of describing the places they visit and of giving us a sort of epitome of the Guide Book, concerning their history. Last year, two cousins, young and enthusiastic, took a trip to Egypt and the Holy Land, from which places they wrote enough letters to

serve Mrs. Robbem to light our fire with ever since. It is only fair to them to say that they warned us of their intention before they left. "Such wonderfully interesting places!" they said. "What a pity you are not coming too! (We did not think so.) But you may rely upon us to write and tell you all about them." We bore up pretty well under the description of the Pyramids and dissertations on Egyptology generally. One of us—we took turns—read these communications aloud at the breakfast table, and when we came to the end—breakfast was a very long meal on these occasions—we both said, "How extremely interesting," and sighed. But when, after hasty descriptions of the warmth of the desert, our cousins reached Palestine, their letters became altogether too much for us.

"At 10.30 A.M. on Tuesday last, we reached Aphek, so constantly the scene of contest between the Syrians and Israelites. Here, as you will remember, Ahab, King of Israel, defeated and took prisoner Benhadad, King of Syria. The weather continues hot. Ernest drinks nothing but the light wine of the country. I am a water drinker as usual." Now, although we are perfectly indifferent as to how much of the light wine of the country Ernest drinks, as to whether he drinks any, or whether he does not drink at

all, and do not care in the least whether or no his brother has given up his stupid ideas on the subject of total abstinence, yet we think these puerile details infinitely preferable to gratuitous information about Aphek. We *don't* remember anything about it and if we did we should want information on the subject even less than we do at present. Now how much better would it have been for us if our cousins had always confined themselves to the cheap brevity of the postcard !

We each have a packet of letters in our desks now—almost the only ones we keep—which we don't remember having considered particularly valuable at the time we received them. Neither has seen the other's packet, but the contents of each are probably much alike. "The last report was dreadfully bad and Papa was very much vexed. Mary has made another of those cakes, and she trusts the jam-pots won't be broken in the post. The east wind is very treacherous, so pray don't leave off your great-coat, and you *will* try to be always a good boy, &c."

On the whole, though we do not say so even to each other, we consider these letters—and such as these—may be safely allowed to form

an exception to our admirable postcard rule. But we beg to inform everybody that it is the only one we allow.



ON THE SEA

*"There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar."*

SOME people look upon the sea with the eye of disapproval. They take it quite seriously to be an evil which is not even necessary, for one cannot drink it, and like a much-advertised commodity of the day, it won't wash clothes. They consider it in the light of a let and hindrance standing literally in the way—between them and Paris, not to mention other pleasant places. They connect it with the smell of warm engine-oil—the throb of the screw and the voice of the

purser asking for tickets when all their thoughts are centred on their inner persons. But the sea is a power in the world. The sea is the mistress of more hearts than ever was Helen of Troy. She is a siren who takes the best years of a man's life, and will not let him go, even when he is old and worn out. These hoary lovers may be seen hanging around her skirts at every port in the world, and on all coasts in the universe. They still live on her smile or frown, and can talk of nothing else. They are not jealous, for her smile embraces them all, and they have all known her frown. The aggressive love of Scotchmen and Germans for their native land is as nothing compared to the love of a sailor for the sea. What is the sound of the pibroch or the taste of *leberwurst* compared to the smell of tar? The smell of tar has a singular power over some of us. It lifts our feet from the pavement and sets them on the reeling deck. It transforms the roar of street traffic into that long, long duet, where the wind sings tenor through the rigging to the sweet low baritone of the sea; and the shuffling of feet on the wet stones is naught else than the surge of the receding wave beneath the lee quarter. All around us we see again the grey-green of troubled ocean, the curling crests; the shadowy

trough, and overhead the dense, impenetrable grey of a gale sky, where the cynic gull swoops down before the screaming wind only to rise again facing it with a defiant cry. And the street empties suddenly—it is the forsaken deck, for the steward is snug in his galley amidships, with his half-door bolted; and the watch is crouching forrard at the lee-side of the deck-house. The deck is not only wet but the water is running from side to side four inches deep; for the green seas plump over the weather rail as fast as the scuppers clear her. The green paint of the winch, and the bright red of the fresh-water pump stand out in strong relief against the universal dulness, and the white base of the mainmast is washed very clean except for a runnet or two of rust. The slack of the fore-top-gallant lee brace has been carelessly coiled over the belaying-pin; for the end has fallen and washes lazily from side to side as she rolls.

On the quarter-deck the skipper and the second mate stand quite still, with their booted legs set well apart, on either side of the wheel, where the best man is on his best behaviour. It is exercise enough to stand quite still when she is “running before it,” even with life-lines stretched fore and aft.

Something has broken adrift down below and

thumps sullenly as the vessel rolls. No—stay—is it so? Of course not. It is the throb of a printing press in a cellar beneath the pavement, and the smell of tar came from a passing coal cart after all.



ON
VISITORS

"Some thereby have entertained angels unawares."

WE do not refer to the afternoon visitor who can be dismissed with a cup of tepid tea and a few disparaging remarks on the weather, but to that visitor who precurses his coming by four letters and six postcards (changing the day of his arrival each time), and who finally bursts upon us, with a portmanteau, a Gladstone bag, and unlimited expectations of enjoying himself.

Our earliest experiences of the visitor genus were other youthful (extremely youthful) Wackemtonians whom we were allowed to bring back with us to spend the holidays. We remember that their visits were usually much shorter than had originally been intended, for after we had

unitedly reduced our sisters to tears and complaints, broken all the available furniture, and brought the cook to the verge of hysterics, there really seemed nothing to do but to fall upon each other and settle old scores by bloody battles. So our mammas corresponded, and the visitor went home three weeks earlier than had been arranged.

Later on, the Captain of the Wackemton first eleven, or some other equally great hero, sometimes condescended to pay us a short visit. We took care, of course, to impress upon our parents and sisters what a deep honour was being conferred upon them. We abjured tea in the schoolroom, while games with our small brothers and "gins" for the servants were as if they had never been. If our sisters were pretty enough, the great man sometimes condescended to accept their photographs, and they always made a point of wearing their best dresses during his stay with us. We think on recalling these visits, it must have been slightly wearisome to have been so continually on such dignified behaviour. We can recollect heaving a faint sigh, not entirely of sorrow, when the last glimpses of a certain remarkable checked overcoat disappeared in the dogcart at the turn of the drive.

Our sisters, of course, have their friends to stay

also. At one period of our lives we remember hating these ladylike visitors with a fierce and active hatred. We recollect pulling their hair surreptitiously and melting their wax dolls in front of the nursery fire. At a later stage, we fell in love with them, regularly and with them all, impartially. We did not mind if they were plain or beautiful, and we think they accommodated themselves to our sticky embraces really wonderfully. We must have been a perfect god-send to our sisters, for our love-making entertained their visitors during the whole of the stay. We had a regular plan of action, and can safely say we never knew it to fail. We always began by squeezing their hands with intense warmth and infinite depth of meaning when we bade them good-night on the first evening. By the next afternoon we were embracing them in the shrubbery. And after that the affair went with a swing. We gave them gooseberries, the ripest there were, and toffee when we could get it, and they cut off pieces of their hair and pressed them discreetly into our possession in envelopes. We corresponded with them for quite a week after they left, and then our affection cooled and gave place to another.

We are now more critical over our sister's guests. We do not care for impassive young

ladies, even if they be pretty, who arrive with huge arks of boxes, and sit upright all day in the drawing-room, waiting to be amused. Our three modest carpet dances and our best tennis party, on which we had previously reflected with no little pride, dwindle into a miserable insignificance under the calm, crushing glance of a young lady who has been used to balls at the Métropole, and to garden parties where they have Corney Grain. The mild admiration of our four nice curates must seem very tame to persons who (they tell our sisters so when they wax confidential over their hair-brushing at night) are accustomed to the very best devotion of the very best set in London.

At intervals, fairly long intervals, our rich aunt comes to stay with us. Of course we make no difference for her at all. That is one of the very first things our mother tells her when she arrives. Aunt Bessie will, we know, be content to take us just as we are. Only somehow when she is with us we all, quite by chance of course, arrive down punctually for the nine o'clock breakfast perfectly fresh and smiling. Whereas there certainly have been occasions on which the meal has been dawdled out until ten or half-past, and when we have committed the enormity of sitting down to it in carpet slippers and an

ancient shooting jacket. At lunch, too, the cold mutton is relegated to the servants, and we eat roast chickens as though we had never finished up scraps in our lives.

Our aunt is of an Evangelical turn of mind, and we drive her three miles on Sunday to a place of worship where the minister wears a black gown and the congregation mumble the Thanksgiving after him. We do not so much as allude (such is our tact and delicacy of feeling) to the ornate Anglican service we are wont to attend ourselves.

But it is sometimes more trying to *be* visitors than to have them. We have been waylaid into houses where breakfast is at a quarter to eight, and in our unsuspecting innocence have been beguiled into staying with Spartans who are warm when there is no temperature to speak of, and who consider bedroom fires an indulgence only less iniquitous than drink.

We have visited serious-minded friends who hide away all the profane literature on the Sabbath. We have been asked, for a month, on the strength of our character (entirely mythical) as a buffoon, to amuse a whole party of dull persons in a country house.

We are of the opinion that there is much room for reform in the treatment of visitors. Person-

ally, we seriously object to be constantly followed about by our host and asked in every breathing space what we would like to do *now*. We prefer it to be supposed that we are capable of spending half an hour by ourselves without getting into mischief, or being bored absolutely beyond recovery.

We object, too, to being set apart by our hostess to be the particular prey of one particularly unscrupulous young lady. It may save a great deal of trouble to announce at once that the plan never answers in our case, and that we invariably fall in love with some other girl who has been especially designed for some one else. It is wonderful what a radiance this other girl has shed over some of the (otherwise) dullest visits we have ever paid. For her sake we have taken a sixty miles journey (in a parliamentary train) for the pleasure of a paltry little Saturday till Monday visit, and got up by starlight to catch the 7.50 back to town.

But that girl has now left the dullness of that remarkably dull country house for ever. We still go back there sometimes, as in duty bound, and share the depression of those fellow-sufferers—her parents. If we were sentimental, which we are not, we might stride nightly about those dark shrubberies where we once wandered with

her, lost in gloomy meditations, and vowing vengeance upon our successful rival.

But the dining-room being much warmer and more comfortable, we leave the shrubberies to toads and dampness and remember her between the puffs of a cigar and our host's rambling stories.



ON LUCK

"Fortune brings in some boats that are not steered."

AUNT ELIZA says that there is no such thing as luck, and we invariably agree with her when she is present. We have some small expectations from Aunt Eliza.

But when she is not there we admit that luck does exist. Our respected relative talks, in a hushed voice, of Providence, and when she does so we fold our hands and endeavour to look resigned. When she is not there our reception of the trifling drawbacks of existence is somewhat different. We are not at all resigned, and we frequently say : " Blank our luck !"

If Aunt Eliza were amenable to reason, or within the reach of logic, if likewise, we had no expectations, we could convince her in ten minutes that the most important adjunct to life and health is luck. No young man, no maiden, nor any other type of humanity mentioned in that hymn, of which the number and the words have for the moment slipped our memory, should be without it.

Luck confers appointments in unlikely places, and apports incomes to the poor and needy. Luck glorifies a very common talent into genius, and advertises the twaddle of some of our literary compeers, who shall be nameless. Luck decorates with the Victoria Cross the breast of the man who lost his head in action, and was too bewildered to run away. Luck loses some well-navigated ships at sea, and brings into port vessels that be guided by the hand of an ass. Luck takes one by the hand and leads him through perils by sea and land, while she puts out her dainty foot and trips another on his own carpeted stair, causing him to break his neck at a most inconvenient moment. Luck decides which of the two is taken, and which left working in the field.

If there be no such thing as luck, how is it that one man falls at a fence, gets up laughing,

and bangs his hat into shape again, while another, falling at the same spot, lies quite still, and does not seem to care about his hat nor anything else that is his? If luck does not exist, how is it that one woman marries the man she loves, and becomes a joyful mother of children, while another walks alone through life in the darkness of a solitude which is only relieved at moments by a flickering gleam of the light that might have been?

If we are free from the influence of luck, how is it that some so distinctly have the roses and some the thorns? This is not an optical delusion, as the goody-goody people would have us believe, but a bare fact. There may be compensation in the hereafter—we can only hope there is—but as for compensation in the present, all that we can say is that we have not yet come across a person prepared to relinquish the roses in order to accept the thorns upon the chance of it.

The thought does not seem to have suggested itself to Aunt Eliza that Providence might have other things to think about than such a trivial item as the temporary happiness or misery of an obscure human being. Of course we do not mean to insinuate that *her* weal or woe is a matter of indifference to Providence because the

thought is obviously absurd. She is constantly pointing out to us the prudence and forethought of Providence as demonstrated by the (to us somewhat trivial) incidents of her own life. She once thanked that Power, for instance, for having arranged that she should have the sweeps in the house at the precise period when one of us fell into a dangerous sickness, enabling her to offer, without inconvenience, her services as nurse.

Of course for her it is different, but for ourselves, we feel that we are scarcely justified in demanding of Providence such a minute care. We take it that luck is a handmaiden of Providence and are content to recognize her services. The Higher Power may look after Aunt Eliza, no doubt it does, for her existence is, according to her own showing, a matter of immense importance to the world ; and it is no doubt from a sense of duty toward mankind that she takes such care of herself. But we think that luck has been detailed to look after our more trivial existences and, without wishing to be too exacting, we must say that she is a trifle careless. Nay, she is abominably careless. She is sketchy and thoughtless.

To some men she gives abundantly of a blessing which is absolutely useless to them, and to

others she denies a grain of good fortune by the aid of which they might attain earthly happiness. Sometimes she heaps one kindness upon another, and when she has led the recipient to look upon such gifts as his due, she suddenly stays her hand. We cannot, in justice, say that she has ever tried this upon us ; she has never led us to expect much, and we are always very careful to heap praise upon her whenever there is the slightest excuse for so doing. We are not superstitious, we trust, but we like to keep on the blind side of Fate by avoiding the inside of ladders, getting up late on Friday morning, and, instead of uttering complaint, pretending that our lot might be worse.

Taking it all around we think that luck is kind. In such lives as are being lived out in proximity to our own, we are of opinion that there is more fair weather than foul, more sunshine than cloud.

Personally speaking, we have no cause for complaint. But, as for denying the existence of luck—as per Aunt Eliza's theory—much as we respect that worthy lady (before her face), we must be allowed to say one word (behind her back), namely, Bosh !



ON
UNSELFISHNESS

“The ruling tyrant Self is all in all.”

THERE was, once upon a time, a thoroughly unselfish man. He was so confoundedly—no, we mean *profoundly*—good, that no one suspected him of it. He brought virtue to such a pitch of perfection that ordinary mortals like ourselves sometimes mistook it for vice. He denied himself continuously for the benefit of others; and others accepted his self-denial eagerly—nay, they revelled in it, and took mean advantages. He only wanted a crooked spine and long white fingers with which to perform upon church organs at twilight to make him a perfect character for a book.

When there was only one arm-chair, this man

drew forward a stiff-backed seat for himself, leaving the comfortable lounge for whomsoever it might concern. Those concerned were at first a trifle surprised, for they had moved in society and they knew that if you want anything in this world it is inexpedient to wait for some one to offer it to you. But this feeling of surprise soon died away and was replaced by a supposition that the unselfish man did not care about arm-chairs. This thought comforted the semi-virtuous majority of his friends, adding slightly to the softness of the seat. In the eyes of others, it merely lowered the unselfish one a few degrees, as a person in no way competent to fight his own battles. In the fulness of time it came to be an understood thing that he did not appreciate comfort, and that anything was good enough for him to sit upon.

This spirit pervaded all the waking actions of this young man, whom we have dragged out into world-wide prominence, because we think that the simple narrative of his life may serve as a lesson to others. In his dreams, we take it, he pictured a Paradise where arm-chairs are to be found in such abundance that the blessed may all sit down at once.

He had a busy life, taking it all around ; chiefly because he persisted in doing many

things which were not, strictly speaking, his business ; and for the performance of which other persons were paid a sufficient wage. Thus, he continually fetched things for himself, negotiating loans between the drawing-room and dining-room coal-scuttles, to save the legs of the servant—said legs being at the moment in a condition of repose upon the kitchen fender, while their owner enjoyed a second-rate (to say the least of it) novel. Strange to say, this self-sacrificing habit gained him no popularity in the basement circles. He was merely smiled at ; and those servants who had graced noble and genteel families opined that he did not know his place, drawing therefrom deductions derogatory to his ancestral aspirations.

Another mode of demonstrating unselfishness annoyed his servitors exceedingly. He was wont to rush to the letter-box at the postman's knock merely in order to save the maid the trouble of coming upstairs. To carry out this virtuous intention he filled the house with undignified shouts of " All right, Susan." Instead of being grateful that damsel very naturally concluded that he wanted to spy upon her correspondence.

His aunts and other elderly female relatives described him as a dear good fellow, and took

practical means of proving the correctness of their judgment. They saddled him with a sort of non-commission agency, and became indebted to him for trifling sums which they invariably paid in stamps. He must have spent a considerable sum per annum in postage alone, not to mention cab fares to distant emporiums such as Schoolbreds or Whiteleys, both of which establishments these ladies imagined to be in the immediate vicinity of Wisdom Court, as they always asked him "just to run around." They never realised that threepence off the shilling amounts to as great reduction on the price of a sixpenny-book if purchased in their native town, as it would if the article were bought in London.

He was honorary secretary to a dozen charitable institutions—mark the "honorary," and if you do not understand what it means (which is just possible) look up its full purport in a dictionary. If you have not, however, a work of that description at hand, perhaps you will take our word for it, that an honorary secretary is a gentleman who receives neither pay nor thanks, but only abuse, for services rendered.

He was an easy victim to designing parsons, than whom there is no less scrupulous class of men out of gaol. He managed bazaars and sac-

rificed the dignity of his lay manhood at Sunday-school tea-fights.

All this because he thought so little of his own feelings and so much of other people's that he could not persuade himself to say no.

He was never married because he could not justify himself in asking the young person in question to share an income not exceeding six hundred pounds per annum. We represented to him that, seeing his habits of life, she would undoubtedly have the benefit of five-sixths of the sum ; but he was firm. He waited for the income to increase, and we have reason to believe that she waited also. It is just possible that she was prepared to share the income such as it was, and to take this foolish fanatic as she found him. She did not know him as we did—not in the same way, at all events. For she seemed to see something in him, which, strive as we might, we could not catch sight of. They are sometimes like that—those young persons. They have neither discrimination nor prudence, and, to do them justice, they seem to get along remarkably well nevertheless

He is, of course, dead now. It was not likely that he should live. He was altogether too good to associate with men like ourselves who toss up for the arm-chair or the odd kidney.

On his death-bed he apologised to his friends for giving them so much trouble. He said that he hoped that it would soon be over now, and then they need not worry about him any longer. He even wanted to see the undertaker himself, in order to save others the pain of making certain necessary arrangements. But we dissuaded him, telling him that he would never trouble us again, and that it would be a satisfaction to us to perform a slight service which he could not depreciate afterward as unnecessary and conducive to the development of selfish habits.

We sometimes think that had he been a little less angelic, and a trifle more human, we should have respected him less when he was living and missed him more when dead.

Nota Bene.—We have deemed it expedient to insert this little sketch of a life, essentially illustrative of the noble virtue of unselfishness, instead of launching into vague generalities upon the subject as is the custom of other essay writers. Is it not the human interest that lends a charm and a reality to all abstract things? Is it not the virtuous man we admire, not the virtues he carries brazened on his brow? Eh?

Nota bene, bene.—That girl married some one else!

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